



LAPIN YLIOPISTO  
UNIVERSITY OF LAPLAND

**University of Lapland**



This is a self-archived version of an original article. This version usually differs somewhat from the publisher's final version, if the self-archived version is the accepted author manuscript.

## **Mapping New Genre Arctic Art**

Jokela, Timo; Huhmarniemi, Maria; Beer, Ruth; Soloviova, Anna

*Published in:*  
Arctic yearbook

Published: 01.01.2021

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Citation for pulished version (APA):*  
Jokela, T., Huhmarniemi, M., Beer, R., & Soloviova, A. (2021). Mapping New Genre Arctic Art. *Arctic yearbook*, 2021. <https://arcticyearbook.com/>

# Mapping New Genre Arctic Art

Timo Jokela, Maria Huhmarniemi, Ruth Beer & Anna Soloviova

*The article presents the concept of new genre Arctic art and examples of contemporary art, performances and media productions covering Arctic themes such as resource politics, nature conservation and sustainability. Examples are selected from Norway, Finland, Canada and Russia. The term new genre Arctic art is based on concept of new genre public art introduced by the artist-writer Suzanne Lacy in 1900s to define socially engaged and socio-political public art that involved participatory aesthetics. To some extent, new genre Arctic art follows the strategies of socially and environmentally engaged art in line with international contemporary art. Anyhow, in this article we focus on explaining how new genre Arctic art promotes cultural continuity and pride and possess the agency to hold and revitalise Indigenous and northern knowledge. The selected cases show how artists can empower community members and participants of performances in participation in discussion on resource politics and nature conversation.*

## Introduction

Curator Julie Decker (2012: 7) wrote:

Twentieth century artists primarily based their interpretation of the North on the Landscape. They saw the painted landscape as viewed from one spot, presenting not just material topography but also intensively visual ideas in contrast to the art of place, which brings the viewer inside. These pieces were passive and observational, and made use of calm detachment, which is familiar in Romantic imaginary.

The North and the Arctic are meanings in art that form regional and national identifications, while the diverse and complex meanings of the North — “Nordicity”, “Northernness”, and “Arcticness”— are a common concern in research on Arctic arts and design (Beaulé & Coninck, 2018; Chartier, 2007; Kalha, 2019). In contemporary art, the Arctic landscape is still essential, but today it occurs in videos and photographs, offers material for installations and environmental art and takes place in performances. Today, many contemporary artists and designers from the Arctic use and transform traditions related to Arctic landscapes with the help of modern technologies and are showing their work in international art exhibitions and design expositions, while others work with environmental and societal issues through art. In this article, we draw attention to common grounds of Indigenous and non-Indigenous art being socially and environmentally engaged and tackle a number of heated discussions, such as natural resource extraction and the identity of Arctic people. We discuss contemporary art, performances and media productions covering Arctic themes and sustainability.

---

Timo Jokela and Maria Huhmarniemi are with the University of Lapland (Finland), Ruth Beer is with Emily Carr University (Canada), and Anna Soloviova is with the Northern Arctic Federal University (Russia).

The concept of *Arctic arts* was introduced in research by the Arctic Sustainable Arts and Design (ASAD) network at the University of the Arctic (Jokela & Coutts, 2018) and clarified in discussions of the Arctic Arts Summit 2019 (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020a, 2020b). In this article, we frame the concept of *new genre Arctic art* to define and describe contemporary artistic interventions, public art and performances that include activism and engagement with actual issues. The term has its roots in the concept of *new genre public art* that was coined by the artist, writer and educator Suzanne Lacy in 1995 to define a type of public art that was not a typical sculpture situated in a park or a square but a socially engaged, political and aesthetical interaction in some specific community. The definition was first used in a public performance at the San Francisco Museum of Art and later in Lacy's (1995) book *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*. Lacy defined new genre public art as being activist; it was often created outside the institutional structure that brought the artist into direct engagement with the audience and addressed social and political issues. In the 1990s in the USA, common themes included poverty, racism and equality, and later, environmental issues such as climate change.

By using the concept of new genre Arctic art, we are interested in pondering how Arctic art can possess the agency to hold and revitalise Indigenous and northern knowledge, foster cultural resilience (Sakakibara, 2017) and sustainability, promote the importance of cultural politics in decision making and participate in discussion on resource politics and nature conservation. Art productions that are engaged with social, political and environmental issues in ways that connect art, land, community and tradition are selected for discussion from Canada, Finland, Norway and Russia. With this article, we continue the research on environmental and cultural politics through Arctic arts discussed earlier by, for example, Beer and Chaisson (2019), Beer and Grauer (2012) and Huhmarniemi (2016, 2019, 2021a, 2021b).

In this article, we present and discuss some selected Indigenous and non-Indigenous art in the Arctic. There are over 40 different ethnic groups living in the Arctic from which this article includes First Nation art and Inuit art from Canada, Sámi art from circumpolar areas of Finland and Norway and the Nenets art from North-Western Russia. In the whole Arctic region the proportion of Indigenous people is estimated to be about 10% of the total population. For example, in Lapland in Finland, there are only a few Sámi artists living and working in the region, but about 130 non-Sámi Finnish artists. To emphasize the diversity of Arctic art practices, there are joint exhibition productions that present both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Arctic artists side by side (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020a). Meanwhile, issues on Arctic sustainability, such as the climate crisis, loss of biodiversity and rich cultural heritage, affect the social life, well-being and cultures of people living in the region despite their ethnicity, and call artists awareness and reflection.

This article is connected to the objectives and collaboration of the ASAD network. Besides the artistic interventions and jointly produced exhibitions, ASAD members conduct studies in which the improvement of northern and Arctic activities in the field of art and design are reviewed and critically reflected upon from theoretical perspectives (Jokela & Coutts, 2018). These processes also include comparative studies with the aim of clarifying the concepts used and fostering research collaboration between ASAD members. This article is one of these joint research efforts to better understand and describe the political dimension of Arctic art and describe the shift from art as objects into socially and environmentally engaged interventions.

## Contemporary place-based and socially engaged art practices in Canada's North

Canada, and specifically the Canadian North, is often portrayed through a colonial lens; artist Lawren Harris (1885–1970), who was a part of Canada's "The Group of Seven" painters, was famous for depicting the North in this way: rendering the skies as wide and clear, the foreground as a blanket of unscathed snow, the mountain ranges as triumphant and unblemished, and the landscape as generally void of human presence. Rather than Harris' shallow depiction of place, contemporary artists in Canada's North are being recognised nationally and internationally for their work, which is socially engaged, embedded in community, and concerned with local and global ecology.

Reflecting lived experiences, many contemporary artists in the North acknowledge the need to build strong human/non-human relationships to address the effects of resource extraction and the very real threat of climate change. Responding to these issues, the artworks in the region frequently incorporate traditional practices like hunting, heritage skills such as beadwork, and community collaboration as methodologies of resilience, renewal and activism. Jeneen Frei Njootli, Maureen Gruben and the youth-empowered collective Embassy of Imagination run by artist duo PA (Alexa Hatanaka and Patrick Thompson) are examples of Canadian Arctic artists involved in artistic practices that are engaged with social, political, and environmental issues in ways that connect art, land, community and tradition.

In their 2017 video work, *Being Skidoo*, interdisciplinary artist Jeneen Frei Njootli, from Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, northern Yukon, responds to the current threat of colonial exploitation, particularly the proposed oil drilling that may disrupt the region's caribou calving grounds (Figure 1). Instead of using filmic techniques that irresponsibly present the landscape as unflawed and at a distance like in Harris's paintings, she implements drone footage, a disorienting long focal length, and an ambient soundscape of small motors while moving within the northern terrain (Willard, 2017: 23). The project also centralises traditional ski-dog blankets made with caribou hide and beadwork that were once designed and constructed by community members and passed over as gifts to elders and others. Through careful research in collaboration with cultural consultant and family member Shirlee Frost, Frei Njootli adapted several ski-dog blankets to embellish the front end of snowmobiles. As gift-giving is an honoured practice in Gwitchin culture, the ski-dog/skidoo blankets participate in this act of circulation, as they are made collectively through the sharing of traditional knowledge and will be shared in the community (Willard, 2017).



Figure 1. Jeneen Frei Njootli, *Being Skidoo*, 2017, Exhibition view, Galerie de l'UQAM, Montréal, 2019. Photo credit: Jean-Michael Seminario© MOMENTA | Biennale de l'image and Galerie de l'UQAM.

As artists like Frei Njootli expose and negate the colonial gaze of the North, others work to heal and prosper through postcolonial (Burnham, 2018) artistic strategies. One such artist is Maureen Gruben, who lives and works in Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories. Gruben's artistic practice includes *Stitching My Landscape*, 2017 (Figure 2), a work of land art and corresponding film created at the Pingo Canadian National Landmark, and named after ice-cored conical hills called "pingos" (Willard, 2017).



Figure 2. Maureen Gruben, *Stitching My Landscape* (still), 2017, 6:10. Commissioned by Partners in Art for LandMarks2017/Repères2017.

Inspired by a memory of her brother harvesting a seal and seeing its bright red gut laying taut across the ice, Gruben and members of the Tuktoyaktuk community, including local youth, wove 1,000 feet of scarlet-red material through 111 ice-fishing holes they drilled into the surface of the ice (Willard, 2017). The woven material formed a zig-zagged line that can be seen as an act of weaving the earth back together—collectively—on account of the shared, lived experiences of colonial extractive pursuits and related environmental impacts.

Another artistic practice from northern Canada that has resulted in postcolonial activism is Embassy of Imagination (EOI), a community-engaged art project developed by youth from Kinnagait, Nunavut, and PA System (artists Alexa Hatanaka and Patrick Thompson). From 2014–2020, the group's intent was to provide a creative outlet for local youth and to demonstrate how these creative efforts, which arose from a devastating incident in Kinnagait, could lead to a tangible result (CBC Arts, 2017). In 2015, Peter Pitseolak High School in Nunavut burnt to the ground. EOI turned this tragedy into a positive opportunity by recovering materials like copper and aluminium from the rubble and using it to cast 3D-printed snowmobiles based on much smaller Playdoh versions. Because the youth expressed great interest in learning from their elders about hunting and survival skills in the land—traditions that are less common today—EOI sold the sculptures and used the profits to purchase snowmobiles to support the learning and teaching endeavour. This socially engaged artistic initiative is an example of how Arctic art today often pursues the reclamation of land-based traditions and responds collectively to community needs.

### **Environmentally, socially and politically engaged art in North-Scandinavia**

Art historian Tuija Hautala-Hirvioja (2011) has studied how Finnish artists depicted Lapland as a frontier until the 1920s. She describes the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s as the Lapponism, the golden years of landscape and tourism in Lapland. Anyhow, in this period, only a few Finnish artists depicted Sámi culture because the Sámi were thought to be primitive and not included as part of Finnish culture (Hautala-Hirvioja, 2011). At the same time, making visual arts in Western sense, such as painting, was not part of the nomadic Sámi culture. Some of the first Sámi visual artists were Johan Turi, Nils Nilsson Skum and John Savio, who worked as artists between the 1910s and the early 1950s, passed traditional knowledge on to new generations and introduced Sámi life and culture to non-Sámi people (Hautala-Hirvioja, 2014a). Since that time more and more Sámi have been educated as artists within Western frameworks of art making and participate Indigenous and Western art exhibition and other art events as professionals. In Norway, Sámi University of Applied Sciences educates Sámi artists based in Sámi language and knowledge.

Many Sámi artists today apply similar artistic strategies, methods and approaches as artists internationally. Activistic performances, conceptual sculpting and site-specific art productions are implemented by Sámi artists similarly to others (Hansen, 2016). Themes that Sámi artists tackle include political and polarised discussions on the mining industry, cultural appropriation in tourism, and policy and politics impacting on Sámi culture (Hautala-Hirvioja, 2014b). For example, the artists' collective Suohpanterror promotes such issues as colonialism, the right of the Sámi to self-determination and threats involved in the mining industry.

Artworks deriving from Finnish Lapland are part of socially and environmentally engaged contemporary art that is opposing a plan for an iron ore mine next to Pallas-Yllästunturi National Park. An art-based action-research strategy was used to support the community oppressed by the

environmental conflict. An artist-run community art event, *Art Äkäslompolo*, takes place in a small village in Lapland next to a national park with stunning Arctic nature. The art is engaged in opposing a plan for iron ore mining according to the wishes of locals in the village. The event was organised for the first time in the summer of 2017, with a vision to continue on an annual basis. Café entrepreneur and doll artist Lea Kaulanen operates as the hostess of the event. With the village residents, artists create environmental art and temporary installations on her land in a beautiful pine woodland area. The approach is rooted in new genre public art (Lacy, 1995, 2008) and place-based strategies in public art and community art education (Jokela, 2013; Hiltunen, 2010; Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2021).

One of the event's contributors, Timo Jokela, studied the region's stories, place names and maps. He discovered that several place names include the Sámi based word *kueri*, meaning 'sea trout', a fish with high cultural value that has suffered due to the forest industry and is at risk of being destroyed by the proposed mining industry. Jokela made a sculptural memorial, *Kueri's Journey* (Figures 3–5), as an instance of new genre public art. While building the sculpture, he invited people from the village to talk with him about the river and fishing and to share knowledge of the local ecoculture. The discussions were recorded by video documentation and presented later as a video documentary telling the story of the migratory fish, the river and locals concerned about mining plans. The *Kueri's Journey* is part of a series of artworks participating in environmental discussion in the Äkäslompolo and expanding the means of Arctic art to be place-bound and participatory.



Figures 3–5: Timo Jokela, *Kueri's Journey*, 2018. Wood sculpture. Äkäslompolo. Photos by Santeri Happonen (on the left) and Maria Huhmarniemi, 2018.

Many Sámi artists in Finnish Lapland demand rights to continue ecocultures, such as fishing, even when traditions conflict with the protection of nature. An example of this is a video installation by Sámi artist Matti Aiko presented in the Art Äkäslompolo event in 2018 (Figures 6–7). He documented reindeer killed by wolverines in Lapland, and the video installation may increase sympathy for reindeer herders and hate towards wolves (Figure 6–7). Another example is the art project called *The Moratorium Office*, launched by Sámi artists and activists Nílas Holmberg, Outi Pieski, Jenni Laiti, and the art collective Suohpanterror in collaboration with the activist group Ellos Deatnu! (Long Live Teno River), which has fought against an agreement signed in 2016 by the Norwegian and Finnish governments to regulate the right to fish in the river. Sámi artists protest against regulations that, they argue, threaten Indigenous rights and the well-being of the Sámi (Danbolt, 2020).





Figures 6–7. Matti Aikio, installation in the Art Äkäslompolo 2018. The photo on left by Maria Huhmarniemi, on right a still image from the work *Crime Scene*.

Many new genre Arctic art productions and artistic performances address politics and the battle between southern interest in natural resources and concern among locals in the Arctic. The Norwegian ensemble, The Northern Assembly, consisting of musician Amund Sjølie Sveen, dancer Liv Hanne Haugen and composer Erik Stifjell, has a carnivalistic performance titled *Nordting* (Figures 8–9). The performance stages a confrontation between growing cities in the south and the Arctic as a land of natural resources and exploitation. Audience members at the performance are invited to participate in a series of polls that increase awareness of Arctic geography, cultures and political and economic power structures. As part of the performance, the participants vote for the independence of the North.



Figures 8–9: *Nordting* and audience in the Arctic Arts Summit 2019. Photo on the left by Kaisa-Reetta Seppänen, on the right by Janne Jakola, 2019.

## New public art sustains authentic communities of Northwestern Russia

Artistic representations reflect the key meanings of the North and the Arctic, which have developed in Russian cultural history since the 18th century. Russian art constitutes its northern space as the multilayered aesthetic experience that emerges in the national metanarrative of “going farther north”. The images of the Russian North and the Arctic constitute the reservoir of ethnic (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous), gender, professional and religious symbols that articulate the place-based and participatory practice of a local northern identification.

The Russian High North did not engage artistic interest before the mid-19th century. The artists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century revealed the charming mysteriousness and infinite beauty of the Russian High North in the expeditions sponsored by the Russian entrepreneurs who invested in the area’s



industrial development. K. Korovin, V. Serov, A. Borisov, V. Pereplechikov and A. Archipov created visual images of the Russian Arctic area as a pristine environment and an exotic locale (Atroshchenko, 2013). Both the rural Russian and the Nenets tundra landscape paintings reflected the romantic mood of nostalgia for “primitive” lifestyles in harmony with severe northern nature. The 20<sup>th</sup> century realistic art represented the Russian non-Indigenous and the Nenets Indigenous cultures of the High North in relation to their natural environment and “ethnographic” premodern past. In the Soviet culture the ethnic artefacts of the northern Russian and Nenets Indigenous communities institutionalized within art museums as preindustrial “folk” heritage generally opposed to the professional art domain.

In the 21st century the Arkhangelsk region demonstrates all the key features of the northern Russian cultural space: a complex of architectural monuments, the historic look of cities and villages, rural folk crafts and traditions. The local art evaluation often reflects the hierarchies of classic genres and recreates the established center/periphery opposition. However, several creative projects have promoted the Arkhangelsk region as a democratic and multidimensional art space since the late 1990s. Their sustainability is based on the creative interaction of actors from different backgrounds with the local public. The International Street Theatre Festival, annually held in Arkhangelsk and Severodvinsk since 1990, expands the traditional theatre scene for open city spaces. During the festival week, the audience is involved in mass and multifaceted presentations, including a circus show, acrobat tricks, fire shows, pyrotechnic effects, brass and folklore music, dance, puppet shows, clownery and pantomime.

The projects of place-specific applied arts held at the art residences Zvozland, TAF Oshevensk and Maryin Dom involve artists and communities in multidisciplinary dialogues about their northern identity and cultural heritage. Professional artists enter the art residences’ locations as participant observers of the Other’s cultural domain and recreate the authentic symbolism to constitute the global public meanings of the North.

The new public art forms an alternative perspective when it unites local communities for temporary art-inspired activities, leaving traces in hearts and minds. The goal of the new public art creators is to participate with their audience in the definition and expression of their northern experiences rooted in everyday activities and place-based life stories.

The *Living Currents* project represents how the new public art constructs an aesthetic space for public debates about northern Russian identity. *Living Currents* is a performance combining features of verbatim theatre and contact improvisation dance that was produced by curator Kristina Driagina, choreographer Nikolay Shetnev and director Eva Valieva. *Living Currents* was developed during the three sessions of “Laboratory of border movement”, organised in 2018 by the Arctic Art Institute (curator Ekaterina Sharova). The performance premiere occurred in November 2018 at the third Arctic Art Forum in Arkhangelsk (Figures 10–13).



Figures 10–12: *Living Currents*—2018, Photos by Silvia Shestakova (on the right), Kristina Pivovarova.



Figure 13: *Living Currents* poster (by Karen Kostaniyan).

The performance plot is based on interviews that 100 Arkhangelsk residents gave to the “Laboratory of border movement” participants. The respondents talked about their personal impressions of the North and shared their “northern” life stories and memories. The curators detected in the interviews the key northern symbols that contain the grassroots attitudes to the North rooted in everyday practices of the locals. Later, professional dancers and actors had to represent the key interview narratives in both oral and body improvisation on scene. The performance structure was crystallised in the dialogue between curators, actors, dancers, video artists (Sergey Shigaltsov) and musicians (Dmitry Shlep) about their interpretations of the interviews’ “northern narratives”.

In the beginning, the performance rhythm reflects the chthonic forces of northern nature: snow, storm, frost, river, sea, forest and sky. The actors whisper the Russian words “sneg”, “veter”, “liyod” and “reka”. They make a snowstorm “sound” both orally and bodily. “Cold” materialises in the actors’ movements when they massage their arms and legs or touch an imaginary stove wall to warm themselves. The dance embodies the harsh northern living conditions to illustrate that survival is not a challenge but the virtue of northern personality. Movement is the northern worldview as it protects residents from freezing and death. The Northern Dvina River communicates the past and the future for both local communities and personal histories. White summer nights bring all the Arkhangelsk residents to the river embankment, while midnight sunshine could blur their social boundaries for freedom, warmth and commonality. The actors perform the song “White night at the polar circle and skies play jazz” to remember the jazz and the street theatres’ festivals held in Arkhangelsk each summer.

Suddenly, the performance emotions shift to anxiety and even anger. The actors read the recent demographic, economic and ecological statistics with iron cold voices and declare that “The North is not for people”. The pantomime demonstrates how the majority rejects outsiders and how a community misses each northerner who migrates from the homeland. The actors ask, “How can a northern child live here if the North is not for people?” In 2018, this performance’s message resonated with the ecological protests against a garbage polygon construction in Shies (a territory on the border of the Arkhangelsk region and Komi republic). But this question contains the

universal contradiction of a personal attachment to a place that frequently looks unfriendly and hostile. The dance illustrates the saying, “Do something here or go away, because the North means movement”. The movement brings identification with the North, as the actors declare: “I am a northern child”; “I am a compass always aimed to the North”.

The *Living Currents* performance took place at different sites in Russia and developed its multilayered and specific audiences. Theatre stages, museum halls and open-air festival landscapes empowered the audiences with diverse means of participation and co-creation of the performance’s public meanings. The public response to *Living Currents*, which was expressed on social media, stressed the solidarity experience as the main performance impression. Art participation inspired a public cooperative collectivity as the northern Russian authentic community.

The contemporary Nenets art represents several global trends of the Arctic Indigenous art development. The Nenets visual art develops as the combination of professional western painting techniques and the Indigenous symbolic worldview. The Nenets paintings reveal the *Arctic homeland* story, based on experimental knowledge. For example, the Nenets painters Tyko Vylka and Yavtysy Prokopiyy got professional appraisal as they integrated the Indigenous visual optic to the 20<sup>th</sup> century artistic representations of the High North. The virtual exhibition *Homecoming* (curator Kristina Dryagina) started in 2020 as the part of the ongoing “66°33’ North” project of the Arctic Art Institute (*Homecoming. Virtual exhibition*, 2020). The exhibition presents works by seven Nenets Indigenous and Russian artists created between 1930 and 1995. The Nenets visual narrative constructs the Russian Arctic as a personalized “home” space, constantly reinventing its’ boundaries with the world “outside”.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the Nenets crafts still manifest the sustainable connection between sacral ornamentation, natural materials and practical functions of handmade objects. But the global challenges of the climate change and the Arctic environment pollution raise the status of the Nenets crafts to an independent form of art production which generates the new meanings of the traditional nomadism, minimalism and recycling. For example, the Nenets craftsmen Martin and Anisia Taibarey presented their fur objects at the curated exhibition *I Craft, I Travel Light* in 2016/17 (The Norwegian Association for Arts and Crafts theme exhibition, 2016). The exhibition displayed Norwegian and Russian crafts, as well as works of Indigenous people in the northern areas at the art museums in Arkhangelsk, Murmansk, Tromsø and Karasjok. The Nenets craft objects along with the other artworks created from natural materials by the Russian, Norwegian and Sámi artists exemplified the Arctic artefacts as site-specific objects, revealing the Northern life in constant motion.

## Discussion

There has been an evident shift in visual art from depicting Arctic landscapes and people to new genre Arctic art, in which Arctic politics, cultural identities, traditions and global, regional and local environmental conflicts and resource extraction are tackled. At the same time, the people of the Arctic have gained the agency to make internationally recognised art themselves rather than being observed and pictured by visitors to the Arctic. Means of art-making do not follow the dualistic

tradition of Western art, in which art is done for art's sake and art, design and crafts are separated into different fields of creation and education. Rather, artists transmit the Indigenous way of combining beauty and practicality, arts and design (Hautala-Hirvioja, 2014b; Guttorm, 2015), and other northern ways of knowing into contemporary productions bound to nature and local ecocultures (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020b). Next, we make a few key points based on the cases we presented from the circumpolar North.

In new genre Arctic art, it becomes apparent that the ecological, social and cultural connections in the lives of Arctic and northern peoples are close and therefore have valuable ecocultural knowledge often beyond western culture related to the use of Arctic and northern natural ecosystems and materials in arts, crafts and spiritual culture. Ecoculture is a base for artworks such as *Being Skidoo* and *Stitching My Landscape* as well as the contemporary Sámi art presented in this article. Cultural heritage, which is bound to nature, is either carried on through the means of arts (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020b) or discussed in the arts. Examples of Sámi art, such as *The Moratorium Office* and the video installation by Matti Aikio, highlight how artists demand the right to continue ecocultures even when the biodiversity of nature is at risk. Artists are also able to bring very difficult and complex issues into discussion and get media visibility for local conflicts. For example, tensions between governmental needs, nature protection and continuation of local ecocultures would be less known and discussed if artists did not also present their artworks in exhibitions and events at the capitals of Arctic states.

In this article, we are interested in how contemporary artists use their ecocultural knowledge, often conceptualised as Indigenous knowledge (Valkonen & Valkonen, 2018), as a medium of their art. The concept of Indigenous knowledge, however, does not cover all the cultural, traditional and tacit knowledge among the whole Arctic region and its inhabitants. Huhmarniemi and Jokela (2020a, 2020b) have introduced the term “northern knowledge” to refer to interlinked ecological and cultural systems. The northern knowledge is formed in situated learning in relation to local ecocultures, traditions and diverse cultures.

In the arts, the northern knowledge incorporates cultural heritages and the tacit knowledge of material culture in the making of arts, crafts and media as well as in visual symbols of arts and crafts as a language. New genre Arctic art, as a manifestation and politicization of the northern knowledge, is closely related to place-basedness (Vodden et al., 2015) and revitalisation (Cunsolo et al., 2017; Sakakibara, 2017); beside these, there is a growing interest in the material culture and hand-making skills of the Arctic in contemporary art. This paradigm shift, called new materialism, shifts the focus of art even deeper from conceptual expressions to places, everyday spaces and materiality (Fox & Alldred, 2019). At the same time, the northern knowledge, made public and recognised by means of new genre Arctic arts, shares traditions and passes on the material culture of the Arctic to new generations, even those outside the northern region.

The cultural pride of Northerners and people of the Arctic is promoted in a visible way in performances such as *Nordting* and *Living Currents*. Discussion of Arctic sovereignty is topical when the political control over northern regions by the southern capitals is also directly and indirectly criticised in new genre Arctic arts. The artworks discussed in this article enhance place-bound cultural identity and cultural pride, which is expected to enhance resilience; abilities to adapt to change. On the other hand, some artists collectives demand rights to stick on tradition and thus may be interpreted as opposed to adaptation. Anyhow, new genre Arctic arts reform our views of

concepts such as “Nordicity”, “Northerness”, and “Arcticness” (Beaulé & Coninck, 2018; Chartier, 2007; Kalha, 2019) by highlighting northern knowledge and cultural richness and make the discussion of these issues more evocative even outside the northern region.

Art has been on the margins of discussions on the current situation and future of the Arctic region. When art has been discussed in development strategies of the Arctic, art is commonly associated with Indigenous cultures and their traditions. Lempinen (2019) states that in national strategies in Arctic countries, art is referred to mainly in the context of regional Indigenous populations. At the same time, the art of Indigenous cultures in the Arctic is studied and exhibited widely. For example, Alaska’s Anchorage Museum’s interest in Yupi’ik material culture (Fienup-Riordan et al., 2007) and the Smithsonian Institution’s long-term research (Cronwell, 2010) are great examples of explorations of Indigenous people’s culture in Alaska. Sámi art from Norway was presented in the *documenta 14* in Kassel in 2017. In Venice Biennale in 2019, Sámi artist Outi Pieski represented Finland, and Inuit video producer Isuma represented Canada. Research on Sámi art has also been published (Aamold et al., 2017; Hautala-Hirvioja, 2017). What is less presented in international art institutions is the Indigenous art and culture in Siberia, Russia.

Many new genre Arctic art productions have websites and social media accounts. For example, the collaborative *Shifting Ground* project team developed the interactive “Mapping Change” page (Mapping Change, 2021). Use of social media is another aspect of new genre Arctic art as it promotes communication and platforms for exchange and engagement, for collaboration and new genre projects. Anyhow, in social media, such as Twitter and Instagram, new genre Arctic art includes polarized expression, increasing awareness of colonialization and environmental risks to Arctic nature but also division of Arctic societies. For example, visual artworks referring to violence may be accompanied by hashtags such as #fuckYouColonizer, #thislandismyland and #landBack (e.g. Valkeapää 2021; suohpanterror, 2021). In the current environmental and cultural situations, there is a need for new genre Arctic art that promotes dialogues, encounters, collaborations and mutual understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists and policy makers. In addition, there is need for research that creates mutual understanding about art in the Arctic for Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers.

## Conclusion

The concept of new genre Arctic art and the cases introduced from Norway, Finland, Canada and Russia refer to ways of seeing art, design and craft as intertwined and integrated into ecoculture; it allows them to be seen as empowering the people of the Arctic, enhancing cultural pride and participating in environmental and cultural politics through art. The cases show how new genre Arctic art can possess the agency to hold and revitalise ecocultural knowledge, both as Indigenous knowledge and northern knowledge and promote the importance of cultural politics in decision making and participate in discussion on resource politics and nature conversation. Through new genre Arctic art, artists inform and educate their global audiences, share traditions and pass on the material culture of the Arctic to new generations inside and outside the Arctic. Cultural resilience is enhanced by cultural empowerment, cultural pride and strong regional identity. This resilience supports individuals and communities in facing rapid changes in the Arctic by helping them to transform their traditions into a contemporary culture and in response to contemporary needs. Building on existing ecocultures in Arctic cultures, towns and villages, the skills and strengths of

locals, and contemporary art and international collaboration, new genre Arctic art represents a viable alternative to top-down and nationally curated and coordinated art and cultural projects.

The research presented in this article has its limitation in the narrow sample of artworks selected for the presentation and discussion. In order to better understand the current means of expressions, shifts of paradigms and artists' ways to impact on policies, protection of cultural heritage, environmental conflicts and global awareness of current issues in the Arctic, further research in new genre Arctic arts is needed along with further clarifications of concepts used to describe some of the common grounds interests of Indigenous and non-indigenous artists in the Arctic.

## References

- Aamold, S., Jorgensen, U. A., & Haugdal, E. (Eds.). (2017). *Sámi art and aesthetics: Contemporary perspectives*. ISD LLC.
- Atroshchenko O. (2013). The North in the art of Russian painters. *The Tretyakov Gallery Magazine. Special issue: Norway – Russia: On the Crossroads of Cultures*.  
<https://www.tretykovgallerymagazine.com/articles/norway%E2%80%93russia-crossroads-cultures/north-art-russian-painters>
- Beaulé, C. I., De Coninck, P. (2018). The concept of “Nordicity”: Opportunities for design fields. In T. Jokela & G. Coutts (Eds.), *Relate north: Practising place, heritage, art & design for creative communities* (pp. 12–34). Lapland University Press.
- Beer, R., & Chaisson, C. A. (2019). Canadian selvage: Weaving artistic research into resource politics. *Art/Research International*, 4(1), 180–199. <https://doi.org/10.18432/ari29400>
- Beer, R., & Grauer, K. (2012). Catch and release: Artworks inspiring insight into environmental issues. *International Journal of Education Through Art*, 8(3), 349–360.  
[https://doi.org/10.1386/eta.8.3.349\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1386/eta.8.3.349_7)
- Burnham, C. (2018). Maureen Gruben: QUILLIQ: In darkness, light. *Espace 120*, Automne, 86–87.
- Chartier, D. (2007). Towards a grammar of the idea of North: Nordicity, winterity. *Nordlit*, 22, 35–47.
- Cronwell, A., (2010). *Living our cultures, sharing our heritage: The First Peoples of Alaska*. Smithsonian Books.
- Cunsolo, A., Shiwak, I., Wood, M., & The IlikKuset-Ilingannet Team. (2017). “You need to be a well-rounded cultural person”: Youth mentorship programs for cultural preservation, promotion, and sustainability in the Nunatsiavut region or Labrador. In G. Fondahl & G. N. Wilson (Eds.), *Northern sustainabilities: Understanding and addressing change in the Circumpolar world* (pp. 285–316). Springer Polar Sciences.
- CBC Arts. (2017, December 20). *Creating hope from the burned remnants of their high school* [Video]. YouTube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBa6d\\_4qAn0&ab\\_channel=CBCArts](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBa6d_4qAn0&ab_channel=CBCArts).



- Danbolt, M. (2020). Into the friction. An agitational aesthetic demanding the redistribution of power and responsibility characterised the art field of the 2010s. *Nordic Art Review*. <https://kunstkritikk.com/into-the-friction/>
- Decker, J. (2007). *True North. Contemporary art of the Circumpolar North*. Anchorage Art Museum.
- Fienup-Riordan, A.; Jimmie F. & Rearden, A. (2007). *Yuungnaqpiallerput/The way we genuinely live: Masterworks of Yup'ik science and survival*. University of Washington Press.
- Fox, N. J. & Alldred, P. (2019). New materialism. In P.A. Atkinson, S. Delamont, A. Cernat, J. W. Sakshaug & M. Williams (Eds.), *SAGE research methods foundations*. Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526421036768465>
- Guttorm, G. (2015). Contemporary duodji: A personal experience in understanding traditions. In T. Jokela & G. Coutts (Eds.), *Relate North: Practising place, heritage, art & design for creative communities* (pp. 60–77). Lapland University Press.
- Hansen, H. H. (2016). Constructing Sami national heritage: Encounters between tradition and modernity in Sami art. *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History*, 85(3), 240–255. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00233609.2016.1207701>
- Hautala-Hirvioja, T. (2011). Frontier landscape—Lapland in the tradition of Finnish landscape painting. *Acta Borealia*, 28(2), 183–202. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08003831.2011.626938>
- Hautala-Hirvioja, T. (2014a). Early Sámi visual artists—Western fine art meets Sámi culture. *Barents Studies*, 1(1), 11–40.
- Hautala-Hirvioja, T. (2014b). Saamelaisen nykytaiteen moninaisuus [The diversity of Sámi contemporary art]. *Agon*, 13(3), 14–20.
- Hautala-Hirvioja, T. (2017). Traditional Sámi culture and the colonial past as the basis for Sámi contemporary art. In S. Aamold, E. Haugsdal, & U. Ankjær Jørgensen (Eds.), *Sámi art and aesthetics: Contemporary perspectives* (pp. 99–120). Aarhus University Press.
- Hiltunen, M. (2010). Slow activism: Art in progress in the North. In A. Linjakumpu & S. Wallenius-Korkalo (Eds.), *Progress or perish. Northern perspectives on social change* (pp. 119–138). Ashgate.
- Homecoming (2020). Virtual exhibition. <https://arcticartforum.arcticartinstitute.com/exhibition/>
- Huhmarniemi, M. (2016). *Marjamatkoilla ja kotipalkisilla*. [Artists in the landscape of berry wars and reindeer husbandry: Contemporary art as a forum for environmental politics]. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Lapland]. Acta electronica Universitatis Lapponiensis openAccess.
- Huhmarniemi, M. (2019). Making art in the land of ice bears and lemmings: Art and science expeditions in the Arctic. In T. Hautala-Hirvioja, Y. Holt & M. Mäkilä (Eds.), *North as a meaning in design and art* (pp. 182–194). Lapland University Press.
- Huhmarniemi, M. (2021a). Forest talks to us – art and coping with forest disputes. *ART Education VISUAL Journal IMAG*. DOI: 10.24981/2414-3332-11.2021-8
- Huhmarniemi, M. (2021b). Art-based events for conflicted communities: Engaging and educating through art. *International Journal on Education through Art*, 17( 2), 271–280. [https://doi.org/10.1386/eta\\_00065\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1386/eta_00065_3)

- Huhmarniemi, M., & Jokela, T. (2020a). Arctic arts with pride: Discourses on Arctic arts, culture and sustainability. *Sustainability*, 12(2), 604. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12020604>
- Huhmarniemi, M., & Jokela, T. (2020b). Arctic art and material culture: Northern knowledge and cultural resilience in the northernmost Europe. In L. Heininen, H. Exner-Pirot, & J. Barnes (Eds.), *Arctic Yearbook 2020: Climate change and the Arctic: Global origins, regional responsibilities?* Arctic Portal. Available from: <https://arcticyearbook.com/>
- The Norwegian Association for Arts and Crafts theme exhibition (2016). *I Craft, I Travel Light*. <http://icraftitravel.com/>
- Jokela, T. (2013). Engaged art in the North: Aims, methods, contexts. In T. Jokela, C. Coutts, M. Huhmarniemi & E. Härkönen (Eds.), *Cool: Applied visual arts in the North* (pp. 10–21). University of Lapland.
- Jokela, T., & Huhmarniemi, M. (2021). Stories transmitted through art for the revitalization and decolonization of the Arctic. In R. Sørly, T. Ghaye & B. Kårtveit (eds.), *Stories of change and sustainability in the Arctic regions: The interdependence of local and global*. Routledge.
- Jokela, T., Hiltunen, M., & Härkönen, E. (2015). Art-based action research—participatory art for the North. *International Journal of Education through Art*, 11(3), 433–448.
- Jokela, T., Huhmarniemi, M., & Hiltunen, M. (2019). Art-based action research: Participatory art education research for the North. In A. Sinner, R.L. Irwin & J. Adams (Eds.), *Provoking the field. International perspectives on visual arts PhDs in education* (pp. 45–56). Intellect.
- Jokela, T., & Coutts, G. (2018). The North and the Arctic: A laboratory of art and design education for sustainability. In T. Jokela & G. Coutts (Eds.), *Relate North: Art and design education for sustainability* (pp. 98–117). Lapland University Press.
- Kalha, H. (2019). Conceptualizing the North: Modernist paradigm, historical echoes. In T. Hautala-Hirvioja, Y. Holt, & M. Mälikalli (Eds.), *North as a meaning in design and art* (pp. 182–194). Lapland University Press.
- Lacy, S. (Ed.). (1995). *Mapping the terrain. New genre public art*. Bay Press.
- Lacy, S. (2008). Time in place: New genre public art a decade later. In C. Cameron & S. Willis (Eds.), *The practice of public art* (pp. 18–32). Routledge.
- Lempinen, H. (2019). Indigenous cultures, local lifestyles?: 'Culture' and its sustainabilities in the northern strategies of the eight Arctic states. *Synnyt: Taidekasvatuksen Tiedonala*, (1), 13–24. [https://wiki.aalto.fi/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=151504259&preview=/151504259/151504034/Synnyt-Origins\\_2\\_Arctic\\_arts\\_Lempinen.pdf](https://wiki.aalto.fi/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=151504259&preview=/151504259/151504034/Synnyt-Origins_2_Arctic_arts_Lempinen.pdf)
- Mapping Change (2021). <https://shiftingground.ca/mapping-project/>
- Sakakibara, C. (2017). People of the whales: Climate change and cultural resilience among Iñupiat of Arctic Alaska. *Geographical review*, 107(1), 159–184. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1931-0846.2016.12219.x>
- Suohpanterror (2021). <https://www.instagram.com/suohpanterror/>
- Valkeapää, S. (2021). [https://www.instagram.com/sunnavalkeapaa.\\_/](https://www.instagram.com/sunnavalkeapaa._/)

- Valkonen, J., & Valkonen, S. (2018). On local knowledge. In T. H. Eriksen, S. Valkonen & J. Valkonen (Eds.), *Knowing from the Indigenous North: Sámi approaches to history, politics and belonging* (pp. 12–26). Routledge.
- Vodden, K., Gibson, R. & Baldacchino, G. (Eds.) (2015). *Place peripheral: Place-based development in rural, island, and remote regions*. ISER Books
- Willard, T. (2017). Stitching my landscape: Maureen Gruben. *LandMarks2017: Art + Places + Perspectives*. Partners in Art.